

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home, which is also a school, provides care and education for up to 10 young people aged between 11 and 16 years who have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The service further provides cognitive and art therapy to support young people.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The outcomes for young people are positive with all attending school regularly and making good progress. Young people are well supported to develop their self esteem and staff work well with good procedures to improve behaviours and to manage some challenging behaviour. Young people are safeguarded well and feel safe. Good procedures are in place and followed if young people go missing although records are not always clear about the actions of staff once young people return. Young people are encouraged and supported to enjoy good health and they contribute well to the running of the home which effectively supports them to develop independence skills. Positive relationships between staff and young people help to protect and support the young people and their views influence their individual plans and life in the home. There is robust and detailed monitoring of the running of this service which helps to identify any shortfalls and strengthen practice.

There is one statutory requirement and four recommendations made as a result of this inspection. The home's admissions and discharge register was not fully updated as required under regulations. Records of life events are not always completed for young people to read. Current practice of withholding mobile phones and aerosol deodorants has not been explored and risk assessed with young people and their social workers.

Areas for improvementStatutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
29 (2001)	ensure that the home's register of children accommodated includes all the details required by Schedule 4.1. (Regulation 29.1)	10/06/2011

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that children receive personalised care that promotes all aspects of their individual identity and are treated as an individual rather than a member of a group (NMS 2.1)
- ensure written records kept by the home when a child goes missing detail action taken by staff, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the home and any action taken in light of those reasons (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that ongoing restrictions on communication are agreed by child's responsible authority and regularly reviewed in collaboration with them (NMS 9.4)
- ensure that staff support and encourage young people to reflect on and understand their history and to keep appropriate memorabilia of their time in placement and of significant life events. (NMS 22.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

All young people attend school regularly and make good progress with many achieving good grades in their final exams. The home's routines and good team work between the care staff and the school's education staff support young people's educational progress effectively. Handover meetings at the beginning and end of each day facilitate a clear, consistent transition for young people between school and home.

Young people enjoy good health. They have access to healthy food choices and are involved with cooking and meal preparation at weekends. Young people are involved in planning themed nights where they choose a country and research the food and other aspects. They have suitable opportunities to pursue sports and active outdoor leisure activities and many take part in fishing and football. Some of the home's staff also provide support to outside activities, such as kayaking. Young people receive prompt medical attention when they are ill and routine appointments ensure their medical, optical and dentistry needs are met. Young people's individual emotional and psychological health is supported through access to professional help including behavioural therapy when appropriate.

Young people make good progress towards developing a positive self view. A social worker for one of the young people spoke very positively about the progress the young person had made. They commented the home had provided the young person

with structure and met their individual needs well. Young people contribute appropriately in meetings giving their opinions and taking turns to speak. This includes formal meetings about their family contact and future plans. Young people benefit from suitable contact with their families and friends which is facilitated well by the staff in line with arrangements agreed in individual care plans.

Young people contribute well to the home. Most young people demonstrate tolerance of one another and confidence as they take part in the life of the home, daily routines are observed and behaviour at mealtimes is good. They know what their jobs are at mealtimes and after tea each day when they take turns to serve, clean and clear up. Some young people regularly bake after school and they all take turns to help the chef. They all have responsibilities to do their laundry, keep their room clean and take care of their personal hygiene. These practical life skills help to prepare them effectively for adulthood. Young people are supported and encouraged to decorate their rooms, although not all have taken up the opportunities offered to personalise their private spaces. Some young people are involved with clubs and outside activities. Some are involved in setting up an after-school activity club and a summer fair to which young people who attend the school or live in other children's homes locally will be invited.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **good**.

Young people enjoy sound, long standing relationships with staff. Staff listen to young people's views and wishes and in the last survey young people liked the home and reported that staff are nice. Young people spoke positively about their sessions with key workers. For some young people, having a structured and formal meeting is not productive. However, the staff team use a variety of creative ways to engage with young people and to talk to them about their placements. For example, during activities or whilst having a meal. There are clear and well documented records that refer to this approach. For some young people, engaging or even acknowledging these types of meetings is challenging. Most young people contribute to the weekly young people's meeting, when activities and menus are planned together and sanctions are discussed and agreed. The manager and deputy manager offer a weekly 'surgery' which young people can and do sign up for. The home continues to promote a strong ethos in consulting with young people to improve the quality of care.

Young people contribute to their individual care plans which ensure that they receive appropriate care. Staff provide access to the services and support they need to meet their health and educational needs and enable them to engage in purposeful and enjoyable leisure activities. Staff offer young people opportunities to discuss their placement plans and weekly goals and some engage well with this process. A social worker for one of the young people spoke positively about the good communication provided by the home for the family, social worker and the young people themselves.

Clear boundaries, incentives and sanctions are in place. These are appropriately

tailored to support young people's individual behaviours effectively and conform well and respond to these arrangements. A social worker for one of the young people reported that the staff work well with challenging behaviour and are committed to the young people.

Young people have access to a pay phone and are provided with phone card credit to enable them to make free calls to parents, social workers, and solicitors and to contact children's rights organisations should they wish to. However, they are not allowed access to their mobile phones on the premises and these are held in their individual boxes in the office. Similarly, all aerosol sprays are kept in the office and must be requested to ensure safety. No inventory is kept of what items are held in the office on behalf of young people. The reasons for such practices are not agreed with the child's responsible authority to ensure that they are not unnecessarily restrictive and are regularly reviewed. This does not reflect that young people are treated as individuals in this instance.

However, there are many other examples where individualised care is very much celebrated such as caring for young people from ethnic and minority backgrounds. Staff are very aware of the present gender imbalance within the group. For example, young people from a minority gender are supported and engaged to have a fulfilling placement. This is supported through one to one time from staff of the same gender and positively encouraging external friendships of the same gender.

The accommodation is decorated and furnished throughout to a good standard. Maintenance and repairs are promptly dealt with. For some young people their behaviour escalates to damaging the furniture within their rooms. There is effective strategic planning to support such young people and to help them in managing their behaviour. Bedrooms are repaired in light of such damage within suitable timeframes.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Young people report that they feel safe in the home and outside it. They express confidence in the staff and managers and can identify adults to whom they would talk if they felt unsafe. Young people know how to complain both to staff, managers and to appropriate outside agencies because information is freely available and made easy to use. Young people are able to make formal and informal complaints which are recorded in the log book and they reported positively about these arrangements. Young people have keys to their own rooms which some choose to use. Staff work well in managing behaviours internally and avoiding unnecessary police involvement.

Appropriate child protection procedures are followed promptly in referring safeguarding incidents when necessary. Allegations by young people are taken seriously and responded to within the home's safeguarding procedures. All staff have received refresher training in safeguarding young people and are able to consult with managers and senior workers to guide and assist them in such situations.

The home makes minimal use of physical restraint and this is evidenced since the last inspection and by internal monitoring. Positive intervention training was provided for staff in March 2011 which focused on de-escalation techniques. Staff, when required to hold young people, manage this appropriately.

New staff are subject to safe recruitment processes through the Criminal Records Bureau and references and gaps in employment histories are checked before they begin working with young people. Therefore young people are cared for by staff who have been appropriately vetted.

Good procedures are in place and used when young people go missing to find and return them to the home and these were observed during the course of the inspection. The reasons why individual young people go missing are discussed and identified and appropriate plans put in place, for example agreeing set times to visit friends in the community. All instances of young people going missing are recorded but the record does not sufficiently or routinely include, for example, what action has been taken once they have returned. This means that it is unclear how young people are supported on return and what actions are taken to address any triggers why young people went missing.

The environment is physically safe and appropriately secure with regular maintenance and checks completed. Staff ensure all visitors are aware of the fire safety procedures. Young people and staff regularly attend fire drills and are confident in what action to take in the event of a fire.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **good**.

The home meets the aims and objectives in its Statement of Purpose and provides young people with a good quality and comprehensive guide to the home which includes, for example, details of when searches might be carried out.

Young people are well cared for by a trained staff team who are well supported by their managers. Placing social workers report positively about quality of the care the young people receive and the progress they make. Staff are positive about working in the home and say that they get on well as a staff group and benefit from staff meetings. Staff say they value the recently instigated group art therapy sessions which help them to manage the stresses of the job.

Staff support and encourage young people to reflect on their life histories and events. While this was in the main positive, some recordings of 'memory files' were incomplete. This means that young people who may wish to refer to such personal documents are not always able to do so.

Managers produce annual development plans and six monthly improvement plans based on the findings of the monitoring visits they undertake. There are regular

senior members of the organisation who visit the home and record that young people are consulted about the running of the home and its routines. Such reports are sent to Ofsted within statutory timescales and provide a detailed overview of the homes practice and development.

Records are clear and relate to the progress and development of young people's placements. Records are kept securely and are regularly audited. The home's admission and discharge register does not, however, include all necessary details that are legally required.

The home received one recommendation at the last interim inspection in March 2011 which related to the records kept when a child goes missing. The record has been amended to provide details of the action taken by staff after children have gone missing, although action taken once the young person has returned is not always recorded.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.